

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: October 10, 2013

Agenda Item: Elk Island Wildlife Management Area – Land Acquisition (WMA Addition)

Division: Fish and Wildlife

Action Needed: Final Approval

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks proposes to purchase by fee title approximately 36.5 acres of riparian cropland along the Yellowstone River near Savage, Montana, as an addition to the existing 1,525-acre Elk Island Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The property is currently operated as a private irrigated farm; the current landowners approached MFWP with an interest in selling. FWP will manage the property for public recreation (including high-quality hunting for pheasant, deer and waterfowl, as well as wildlife viewing) and managed crop lands to provide food and cover resources for wildlife. FWP will purchase the land from its long-time owner for the appraised value of approximately \$91,250 (approx. \$2,500/acre). Funding will come from the Habitat Montana account or a mix of Habitat Montana and federal sources (State Wildlife Grants), pending U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service approval.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The Environmental Assessment for the project was released on September 10. Comments will be accepted through October 1. A public hearing will be held in Savage on September 30. Thus far, 4 comments have been received, all in support of the acquisition.

Alternatives and Analysis

The parcel is adjacent to existing Elk Island WMA lands and the Yellowstone River, and therefore the addition represents a highly desirable recreational tract along with productive irrigated cropland. If FWP does not purchase the property and it is sold privately, the public would not have access to this property and its recreational opportunities. In addition, FWP would not be able to protect and restore the riparian habitat or manage the cropland for wildlife benefit. Alternatively, FWP acquisition of the property would complement management of the existing WMA.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends that the Commission approve the purchase of this land as an addition to the Elk Island Wildlife Management Area, conserving important habitat, providing quality hunting and other recreational opportunities, and expanding FWP's management to benefit wildlife populations.

Proposed Motion

I move the FW Commission approve the purchase of this approximately 36.5-acre addition to the Elk Island WMA.